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From Grisons to Lake Schwielowsee

The Swiss author Silvio Huonder first discovered his own style in Berlin

CHARLES LINSMAYER

"Adalina" was the literary sensation of 1997. The novel recounts how Grisons-born Maculin returns to Chur from Berlin after many years to reconcile himself with the fate of his deceased cousin and lover Adalina. But instead of finding deliverance, he realises that the girl's accidental death was the result of his petty jealousy and, plagued by feelings of guilt, he plunges from a rock face into an abyss. And yet rarely has Swiss prose been written so tenderly, sensuously and erotically as in this Grisons home-coming novel that ends in tragedy.

"I could never have written 'Adalina' in Switzerland," its author Silvio Huonder, who was born on 6 October 1954 in Chur, declared on record in 2014. In fact his first novel "Von Silber bis Russ schillert der Regenbogen bei Vollmond" published in 1982 under the pseudonym J.J. Silla gave little indication of Huonder's subsequent qualities. He first discovered his own style in Berlin where he relocated in 1990 and still lives today with his wife and two sons. He resided in Berlin Friedrichshain until 2000 and since then in the village on Lake Schwielowsee which he portrayed in his 2009 novel "Dicht am Wasser".

Expanse of horizon

Coming from the mountains of Grisons, Huonder found an "incredible expanse of horizon" in Berlin and a landscape dominated by water conducive to his writing. "I looked out from my study over the water whose surface always looks different depending upon the time of year, light and weather – gleaming metallic, frothed up by the wind or as smooth as glass."

After writing four plays, in "Adalina" he produced the book that enabled him "to confront Chur and put the past behind him". His second novel "Übungshefte der Liebe", published in 1998, again portrayed a young Swiss man's escape from his native country, but this time with a conciliatory ending.

Huonder's 2006 family novel "Valentinsnacht" was set entirely in Berlin. The city and its bodies of water also play a key role in probably his most brilliant work to date, the

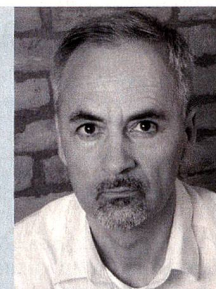
2008 volume of stories entitled "Wieder ein Jahr, abends am See" and then go on to develop a magic in the previously mentioned novel "Dicht am Wasser" which has a lasting impact on both the destinies narrated and the crime story plot. Taken as a whole, Berlin is not just the backdrop to the novel but also a narrative subject.

Returning with an historical novel

In 2012, with "Die Dunkelheit in den Bergen", Huonder again revisited Grisons. However, it is set in 1821 and tells the tale of two soldiers from Grisons who return home to Chur after serving with the Dutch military and investigate a murder at the behest of Baron von Mont. The historical setting, the precisely researched details and the intensity of the landscape and language not only produce an extremely credible, riveting crime story but also provide compelling evidence that Huonder is again entirely comfortable with the backdrop and milieu of Grisons 18 years after "Adalina". Despite having been a Swiss Abroad for 25 years, Huonder has never really cut his ties with home. At any rate, as a lecturer at the Swiss Literature Institute, he travels between Berlin and Biel every week by train.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

Bibliography: Silvio Huonder's books are available from Nagel & Kimche, Zurich.



"A fear grew in him. The fear that all that now awaited him was his cousin. It was as though she could wait for him at the railway station, Adalina, a ghost from the past, silent and reproachful."

(From the novel "Adalina", 1997, Arche-Verlag, available from Nagel & Kimche)